

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Rock Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail Offers A Shady Hike for a Hot Day

By Fran Wallas

**T**he chance to see eagles and the endangered plant Large-Flowered Skullcap are among the attractions of a hike along the Rock Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail.

The hike begins on a paved handi-capped accessible trail at the parking lot. You will soon come to a sign with many hiking options. Choose the hike that works the best for you depending on when you want to eat, whether you want to play in the creek, or how far you want to hike. The best picnic areas are the Rock Creek Overlook, the Leggett Point Overlook, and shady spots beside Rock Creek.

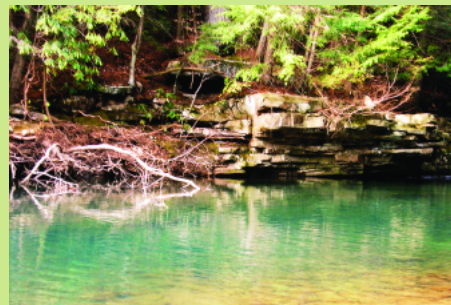
For a pleasant six-mile day hike, take the connector trail to the Rock Creek Loop. The trail is marked with white blazes. You can listen to Rock Creek most of the hike. If you come back in the winter, you can see the creek most of the hike.

The connector trail ends at the loop trail in 1.2 miles. The sign says "Cumberland Trail" with arrows pointing to the right and left. Take the trail to the left to continue hiking in Rock Creek gorge. There are several chances to explore the creek, cool your feet, and enjoy a scenic snack. In about a mile, you will come to a long bridge made out of natural trees. If your stomach is growling at this point, you may want to go across the bridge to take a short detour to Rock Creek Overlook. If you can wait for an

even better lunch spot, don't cross the bridge and continue on the Rock Creek loop. You will climb out of the gorge on a series of switchbacks with beautiful rock outcroppings. At the top, turn right. A short walk brings you to another sign leading you to the Leggett Point Overlook. This side trail has yellow blazes and ends at the overlook in two-tenths of a mile. You may be lucky enough to see the rhododendrons in bloom all along the way. Take time to enjoy the beauty of this special place. You may even see a pair of eagles.

When you get back to the main trail, turn right, and hike about 1.4 miles to complete the loop. As you hike back down into the gorge, keep a lookout for an endangered species of plant called Large-Flowered Skullcap. Contrary to its name, this perennial herb in the mint family has very small but elaborate purple flowers. The trail had to be rerouted to protect these plants. When you finish the loop, you should recognize the sign and turn left on the connector trail back to the lower Leggett parking lot.

Volunteers built this wonderful trail. If you would like to help build connecting trails, sign up for the "Big Dig." You can volunteer as much or as little as you would like from May 22nd- June 25th. No experience is necessary. Detailed information is available on the Cumberland Trail Conference Web site [www.cumberlandtrail.org/](http://www.cumberlandtrail.org/).

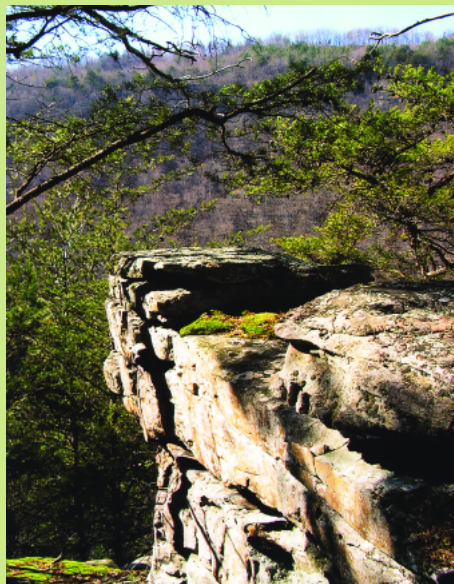


A scene of Rock Creek, next to the trail. There's nothing like cold water on a hot day.



Volunteers Bill Leiper, second from right, and Veronica Greear, right, help build the Cumberland Trail.

**Below, left:** Leggett Point Overlook is a perfect lunch spot. **Below, right:** Large Flowered-Skullcap blooms in May. A population of the flower was protected when land was purchased for the Cumberland Trail.



Division of Natural Heritage

### Directions

**Directions to the Rock Creek trailhead:** From Hwy 40 take Hwy 111 South to Hwy 27 and go east towards Dayton to the town of Sale Creek about 6.2 miles to Leggett Road. Turn left on Leggett Road, a tiny intersection. (You may want to ask for directions to Leggett Road at a service station in Sale Creek.) Drive about 1.6 miles to a paved drive on the left that leads to a large paved parking lot. You will see the sign for the Rock Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail.

#### Rock Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)